The following is a complete listing of the claims, and replaces all earlier version and listings.

1.   (currently amended): An image processing method comprising the steps of:

inputting image data representing an image, the image data including a plurality of color components;

deciding output data of a plurality of[[,]] color components, which represent an image reproduced by an output device, by referring to a table in which a correspondence between input data and ~~the output data~~ a plurality of output patterns is stored, based upon the input data, wherein the input data is generated by adding data distributed based upon color difference to the image data of the plurality of color components, and the color difference is generated by calculating the difference between the input data and the ~~output data~~ plurality of output patterns; and

outputting the output data of the plurality of color components decided in said deciding step,

wherein~~, in a case of an image in a specific area in which image is represented by at least two color-component data, output data of color component of any one is decided in said deciding step~~ the output data is decided from candidates of a plurality of output patterns which are respective combinations of the plurality of color components based upon the color difference, and the combinations in which cyan and

magenta are simultaneously used have been excluded from the candidates in high-contrast area.

2. and 3.   (canceled).

4.   (previously presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the output data of the plurality of color components is decided based upon quality of printing required.

5.   (previously presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the output data of the plurality of color components is decided based upon characteristics of printing media.

6.   (previously presented): The method according to claim 1, wherein the output data of the plurality of color components is decided based upon impact precision of an output dot pattern.

7.   (currently amended): An image processing apparatus comprising:

input means for inputting data of a plurality of color components, representing an image;

deciding means for deciding output data of a plurality of[[,]] color components which represent an image reproduced by an output device by referring to a table in which a correspondence between input data and ~~the output data~~ a plurality of

output patterns is stored, based upon the plurality of items of color-component data of input data, wherein the input data is generated by adding data distributed based upon color difference to the data of the plurality of color components, and the color difference is generated by calculating the difference between the input data and the ~~output data~~ plurality of output patterns; and

means for outputting the output data of the plurality of color components decided by said deciding means,

wherein~~, in a case of an image in a specific area in which image is represented by at least color-component data, output data of color component of is decided by said deciding means~~ the output data is decided from candidates of a plurality of output patterns which are respective combinations of the plurality of color components based upon the color difference, and the combinations in which cyan and magenta are simultaneously used have been excluded from the candidates in high-contrast area.

8.   (canceled).

9.   (currently amended): A computer-readable recording medium encoding a program for causing a computer to perform an image processing method comprising the steps of:

inputting image data representing an image, the image data including a plurality of color components;

deciding output data of a plurality of[[,]] color components, which represent an image reproduced by an output device, by referring to a table in which a correspondence

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between input data and ~~the output data~~ <u>a plurality of output patterns</u> is stored, based upon

the input data, wherein the input data is generated by adding data distributed based upon

color difference to the image data of the plurality of color components, and the color

difference is generated by calculating the difference between the input data and the ~~output~~

~~data~~ <u>plurality of output patterns</u>; and

outputting the output data of the plurality of color components decided in

said deciding step,

wherein<u>,</u> ~~in a case of an image in a specific area in which image is~~

~~represented by at least two color-component data, output data of color component of any~~

~~one is decided in said deciding step~~ <u>the output data is decided from candidates of a</u>

<u>plurality of output patterns which are respective combinations of the plurality of color</u>

<u>components based upon the color difference, and the combinations in which cyan and</u>

<u>magenta are simultaneously used have been excluded from the candidates in high-contrast</u>

<u>area</u>.